Power Demand Soars as Temperatures Plummet

Bonneville Power Administration

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PORTLAND, Ore., - Near-record cold has Northwest residents *shaking* and *rattled* but, fortunately, the Columbia and Snake rivers continue to *roll* with ample water. This has allowed the Bonneville Power Administration to meet the needs of its customers despite the numbing weather.

The morning of Feb. 2, BPA's system peak load hit 12,160 megawatts, the second-highest level on record, as Northwest residents cranked up their heat in response to continuing below-normal low temperatures.

But that wasn't cold enough to beat the all-time system load record set during the infamous Arctic Express of December 1990. At 9 a.m. on Dec. 21, system peak load was

12,464 MW as the average temperature across Seattle, Spokane and Portland sank to 10.5 degrees.

BPA's transmission and generation system has been reacting well to the recent cold spell. The system withstood the rigors of the high-demand period with only one substantial outage - Eatonville, a town in the Washington Cascades was without power for over 18 hours on Feb. 1 after a transformer failed in the substation serving the town. BPA trucked in a spare transformer from Vancouver, Wash., and worked through the night to restore service. Maintenance crews were able to replace the damaged transformer in 15 hours, half the time usually required for such repairs. During the outage, BPA provided a portable generator that supplied heat and light at the local community center.

Fortunately, the Northwest's winter has brought record rainfall, resulting in record streamflows throughout the Columbia River Basin. Before the cold spell hit, BPA was selling large amounts of surplus power from the Federal Columbia River Power System to Northwest and California utilities. Those utilities were using the cheap surplus hydro power to displace higher priced power from gas, coal and oil plants.

When the cold snap hit, BPA reduced its surplus sales to meet required loads in the Northwest. BPA structures surplus sales to gain revenue while retaining the ability to recall the power when it is needed. Revenue gained from selling surplus power is used to offset power purchases when Northwest loads exceed BPA capacity. During the cold spell, BPA purchased power briefly during the morning high-peak hours - from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.

"This is shaping up as a winter to remember with the wind storm in December and now the cold weather. But, with the well-engineered BPA transmission grid and dedicated employees, we are able to deliver the power to the customer even under these extreme conditions," said Darrel VanCoevering,

manager of system operations.

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